

# *Baltimore County Animal Services 2018 Progress Report*

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Sara Pizano, DVM, MA  
TEAM SHELTER USA, LLC | [DRPIZANO@TEAMSHELTERUSA.COM](mailto:DRPIZANO@TEAMSHELTERUSA.COM)

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## INTRODUCTION

Baltimore County is fortunate to have a new animal services building and a progressive leadership team put in place in the last several years. An enormous amount of progress has been made in every aspect of the operation from community and enforcement programs to enhanced life-saving and innovative enrichment for shelter pets.

Although there is no umbrella organization over animal welfare establishments, core Best Practice guidelines are shared by all the major reputable organizations to include the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty for Animals (ASPCA), the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), Maddie's Fund, Best Friends Animal Society and the National Animal Control Association (NACA). In addition, the Association of Shelter Veterinarians *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters* stands as the gold standard of Best Practices in the shelter. These guidelines have been adopted in the Maryland state statute.

***Baltimore County Animal Services is a progressive and innovative organization that should be considered a national role model for other municipal shelters.***

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Shelter leadership engages with many national organizations and are now members of the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, Society for Animal Welfare Administrators, Petsmart Charities and the Million Cat Challenge.

In April of 2016, Baltimore County Animal Services (BCAS) leadership hosted the Target Zero team to complete an assessment and most recently invited Team Shelter USA to complete a follow up assessment to gauge progress. This is highly commendable and a testament to the effective shelter leaders who are constantly attempting to improve their operation and ensure they are cutting edge. Reference will be made to the 2016 report where appropriate.

Municipal shelters were originally created to protect animals from dangerous people and people from dangerous animals but they have morphed into more full-service operations over the years. We now know that the enforcement responsibilities of a public entity can and should be married to accessible community programs and life-saving. Euthanasia as population control is no longer acceptable in the United States and the general benchmark for success is saving 90% or more of the animals entering the shelter. This is with the caveat that public shelters will always face some level of euthanasia as large

dangerous dogs that cannot safely be rehabilitated and animals medically beyond help should be part of the euthanasia pool. Live outcome percentages must be analyzed with that in mind.

The BCAS team has made remarkable strides in life-saving. Typically, there is a direct correlation between intake and euthanasia of savable animals. However, the overall intake has been increasing at least since 2014 while the number of animals euthanized has decreased. It is hypothesized that the opening of the new shelter facility has led to an increase in intake as the public has more confidence in the organization. Increasing the live release percent in light of increasing intake is impressive.

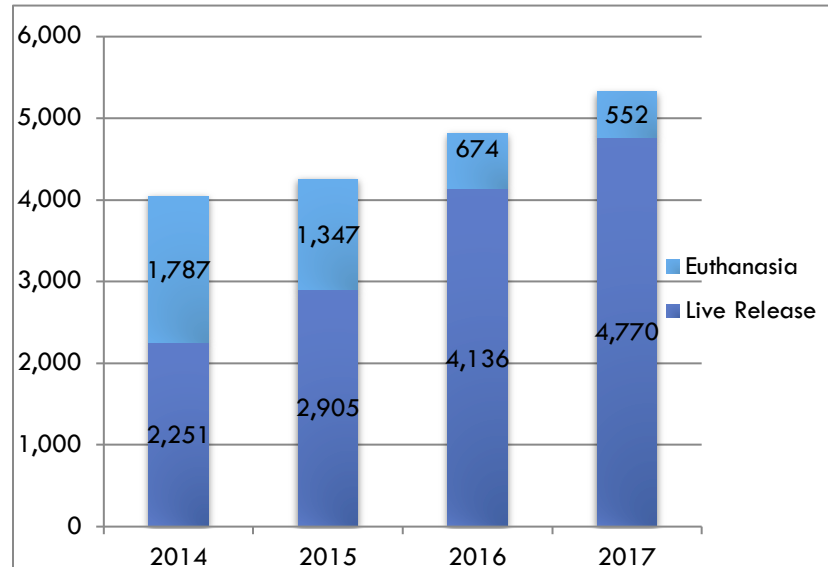
***Live Release Rates have increased from 53.4% to 89.6% between 2014 and 2017. This is an astounding increase not commonly seen in public shelters in such a short period of time and despite an increase in intake.***

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The definition of success for sheltering has been changing over the last decade, in particular. Providing accessible services to the population of people and pets that account for the majority of the shelter intake numbers is key. The BCAS team has been developing these key programs which will be highlighted in this report. These appropriately designed programs will ultimately lead to a productive decrease in shelter intake as constituents are provided with services outside the shelter system. As a result, the shelter space can be reserved for pets with no other alternatives and who need a safe haven such as victims of cruelty and neglect.

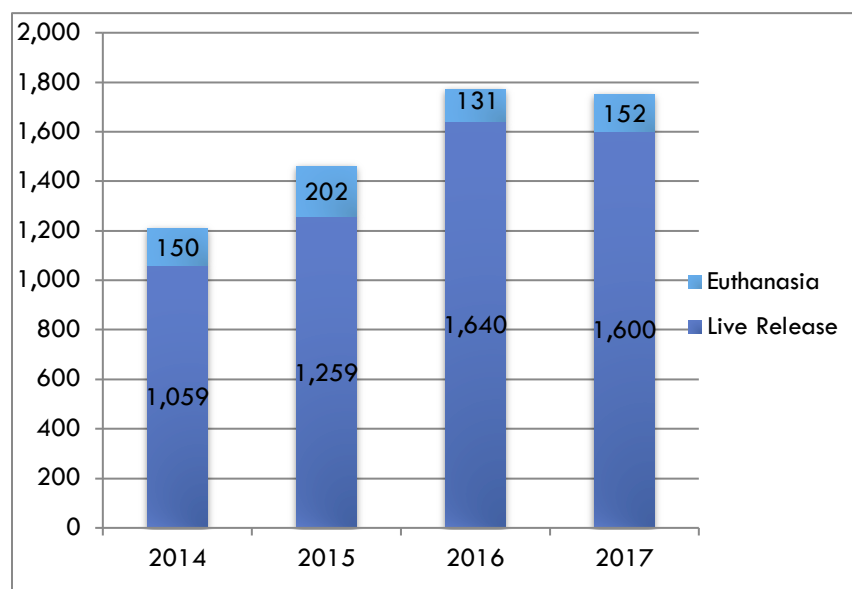
## SHELTER STATISTICS AND TRENDS

### *Live Release vs Euthanasia of Shelter Dogs and Cats*



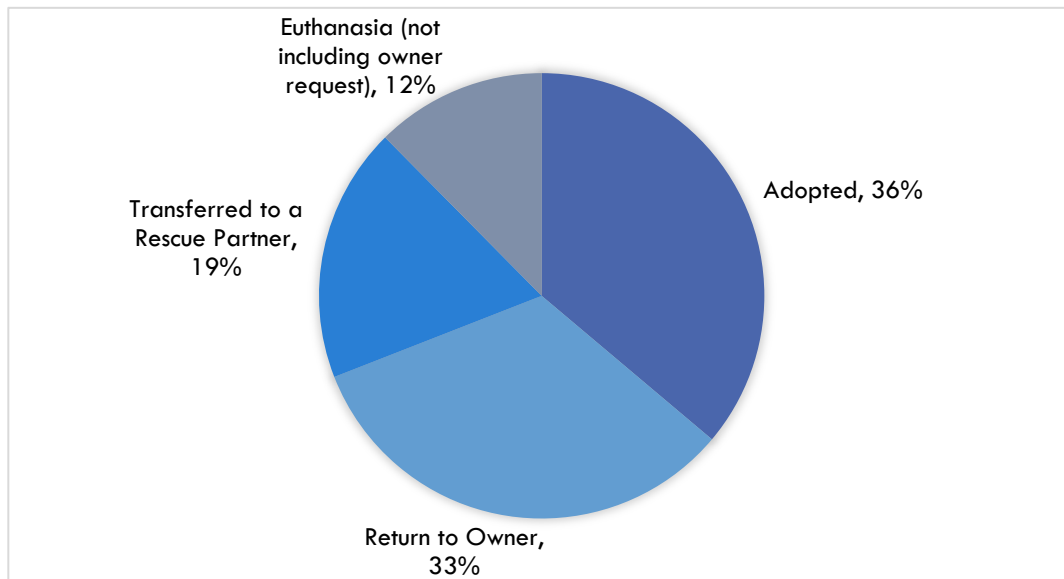
**Figure 1:** Shows the desired trend of decreasing euthanasia despite an increase in intake

### *Live Release vs Euthanasia of Shelter Dogs*



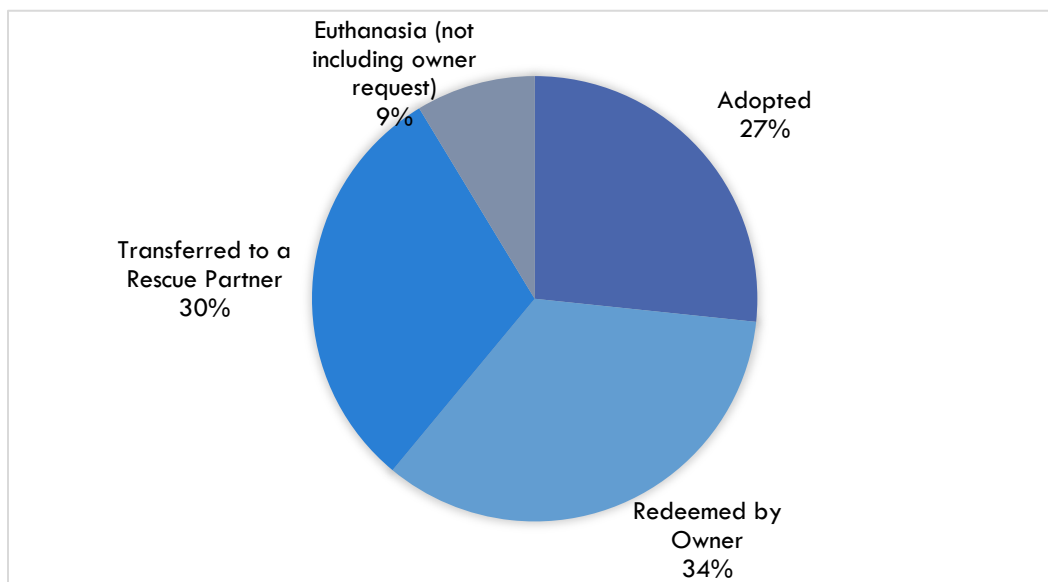
**Figure 2:** Shows the desired trends of decreasing euthanasia until 2016 and decreasing intake between 2016 and 2017

### 2014 Dog Outcomes



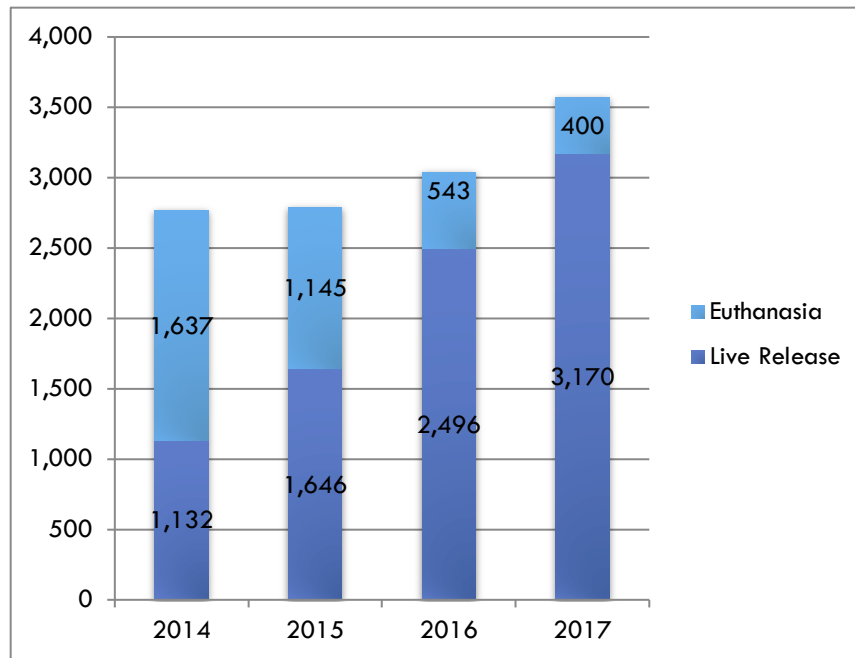
**Figure 3:** Shows the various outcomes by category for dogs in 2014

### 2017 Dog Outcomes



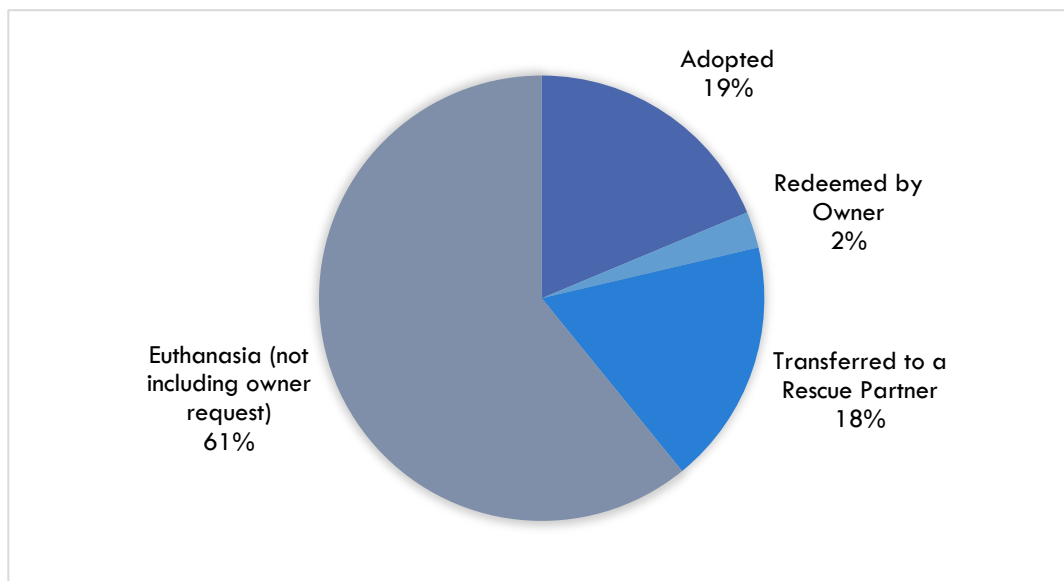
**Figure 4:** Shows the improvement in all live outcome categories and decreased euthanasia percentage for dogs in 2017 as compared to 2014

### Live Release vs Euthanasia of Shelter Cats



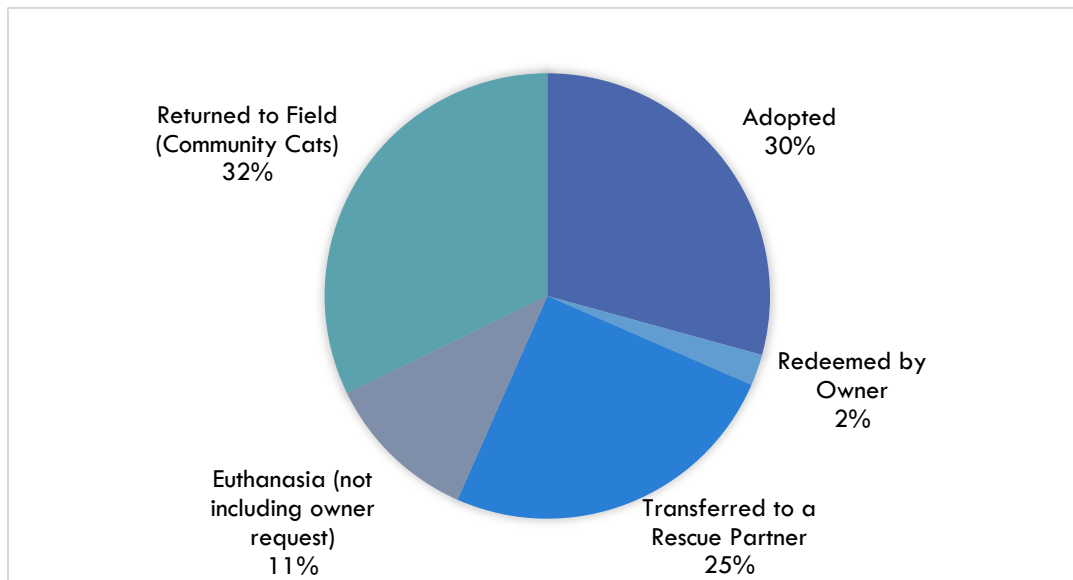
**Figure 5:** Shows the desired trend of decreasing euthanasia, despite an increase in intake

### 2014 Cat Outcomes



**Figure 6:** Shows the various outcomes by category for cats in 2014

### 2017 Cat Outcomes



**Figure 7:** Shows the drastic decrease in euthanasia and positive life-saving impact of the community cat program for cats in 2017 as compared to 2014

## ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Shelter leadership has paid close attention to creating an efficient department and built a foundation with all encompassing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). A technical writer was hired to work with leadership and updated SOPs should be finalized in the near future. Cohesive written protocols are essential for a high performance team.

Current shelter leadership was not involved with the design of the new facility but has been creatively improving upon work flow despite some design challenges. Call takers are stationed behind the front reception desk separated by glass so the public can see but not interact with staff in that section. That set up can often be frustrating for people in the waiting room. From the call taker room, dogs can be heard barking in the kennels so not ideal for phone communication. During the week of the assessment, the call takers were being transitioned to a private, quiet space in the administrative area that was formerly used for Animal Control Officers. This will allow them to concentrate more fully on their conversations over the phone, without distractions.

Leadership in any organization, in any sector, has the responsibility to create one high functioning team around common goals. All staff within an organization, regardless of



job title, should work together in a productive way. Unfortunately, many find themselves working in silos or worse yet, not supportive of one another. This is a very common conflict in animal welfare, in particular between enforcement and shelter staff. Another layer of issues emerges when long time staff are unwilling to change their perspective and do business differently, often citing 'This is how it's always been done'.

Animal Welfare has evolved dramatically in the last 5 to 10 years and this has required all of us to re-examine our long-held beliefs and philosophies. BCAS shelter leadership created an exceptionally innovative way to address these silos by capitalizing on the notion that cross training is at the core of appreciating other staff members. In 2017, all Animal Control Officers and the majority of the shelter positions were reclassified to Animal Services Officers. Each staff in that classification now rotates in the field and the shelter. This has eliminated an 'us' versus 'them' perspective.

***Establishing one classification of staff that rotates through enforcement and shelter duties was an exceptionally innovative way to create a strong cohesive team.***

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Shelter leadership also pay attention to continuing education opportunities and monthly all staff meetings typically include some sort of training such as time management and dealing with difficult customers. A compassion fatigue class was recently postponed due to weather but all staff will be attending once rescheduled. This class is taught by a former Animal Control Officer who is sensitive to the issues the BCAS team faces on a daily basis.

The operation of an animal services department is typically one that is overwhelming with many issues dealt with on a reactive basis, such as responding to an injured animal, for example. Attention to training and continuing education for staff is commonly not interwoven into a master plan so BCAS leadership should be highly commended for their dedication to this crucial aspect of growing a strong and high-performance team.

On the flip side, understanding the service delivery from the customer's perspective is equally as important. Generic Customer Service surveys created by the Health Department have been used in the past but are now being tailored to hone in on questions and perceptions specifically about animal services. This year Survey Monkey requests will be used for that purpose. Again, this attention to service delivery in the quest to improve is applauded and not standard in the animal welfare industry.

Shelter leadership and staff have transformed BCAS in the last 3 years. Prior to that, there was a high euthanasia rate in an antiquated building. In 2017, the live release rate was 89.6% for dogs and cats combined and the new building is now serving the needs of shelter pets and staff. These positive changes have been made in record time and it is crucial that the many progressive changes and encouraging stories about saving shelter pets continue to reach a greater audience.

An existing position has recently been reclassified as a Communications Specialist and is now in the recruitment phase. This staff person will be able to expand proactive social media outlets and increase the reach of already successful Facebook groups, enhance the website content, build Instagram and Twitter followings and more. All these efforts will help tell the true and accurate story behind BCAS and inspire the community to learn how they can help to an even greater degree.

The Communications Specialist can also focus on the traditional media outlets. With this wide array of marketing avenues, the BCAS brand can be further developed. There is great potential for the newly appointed Communications Specialist to align the public perception with the reality of the many accomplishments, pro-active programs and commitment to life-saving goals of BCAS.

## **RESPONSIBLE PUBLIC POLICY**

The ordinance revision recommendations from the 2016 Target Zero report that have been implemented include the 3-day stray hold, eliminating the stray hold for puppies and kittens under 3 months of age and requiring sterilization prior to returning a stray pet to the owner.

BCAS is fortunate that shelter capacity has not been an issue in the new facility but focus should always remain on placing pets quickly. The BCAS team does an outstanding job of creating the most comfortable environment for pets, nonetheless, length of stay in any shelter leads to negative consequences including exposure to infectious disease and higher stress levels for staff and pets.

Shelter data from 2016 and 2017 showed that the vast majority of dogs returned to their owners occurred within 48 hours so a stray hold any longer would serve no positive purpose. After all efforts are exhausted to identify an owner and the stray hold period has passed, dogs can be placed in their new home quickly. Similarly, puppies and kittens are the most vulnerable population and all efforts are made to prevent them from entering the shelter and exposed to common infectious diseases. Removing the stray hold for puppies and kittens, allows for a quick placement and county leadership is applauded for the revised 3-day stray hold for older pets.

Requiring sterilization before the pet is returned to their owner is excellent public policy. In addition to the health benefits, it eliminates the desire of intact pets that roam to find a mate so helps decrease the number of pets at large. Finally, allowing for a pilot program to sterilize cats 'found' outside and returning them to their home location is considered Best Practice as well.

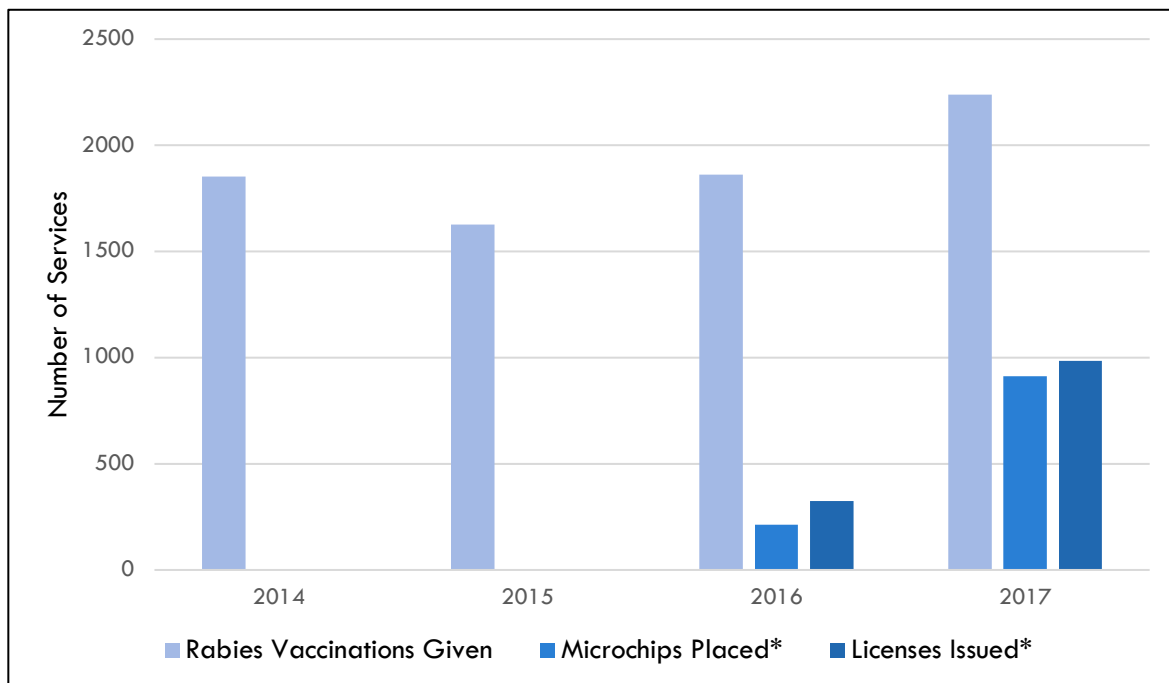
## COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

The most progressive shelters in the United States now recognize that proactive community programs are the wisest investment with the greatest positive impact on the shelter. In addition to productively decreasing intake and the life-saving impact, they are also considered part of a fiscally responsible plan.

**BCAS leadership has designed targeted community programs that will yield a productive decrease in the stray population, shelter intake and provide sustainability for a 90%+ live release rate.**

### Public Rabies Clinics

#### Public Rabies Clinics



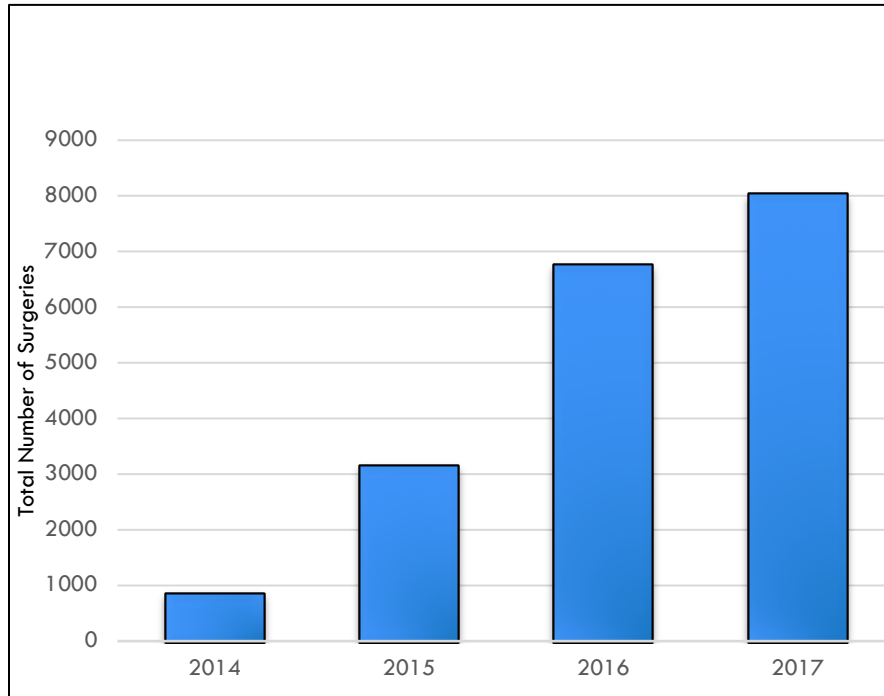
**Figure 8:** Chart depicts the increased services for the public since 2015. Microchips and licensing were offered for free during the public rabies clinics beginning in the summer of 2016\*.

Rabies clinics are hosted at least monthly for the public and the number of pets protected against this zoonotic disease is increasing each year. In 2016, BCAS also capitalized on these events and added microchipping and licensing at no cost included with the \$8 rabies vaccination.

Found Animal microchips are used and considered a key strategy. In addition to being the most economically feasible, this non-profit does not charge owners or organizations to register or update contact information. This is a major barrier with other chip companies that render chips useless when contact information is outdated. Research shows that the majority of pets entering public shelters are from low-income pet owners so assisting this population is essential in the quest to productively reducing shelter intake. By permanently identifying pets, they can be easily reunited with their owners if they are lost or enter the shelter.

The initial pet license is available at no charge during the rabies clinics. This is in line with a community minded approach to animal control and positions BCAS as a resource instead of the negative implications surrounding a punitive enforcement organization. By capturing what is most likely the vulnerable pet owner population, ie., low-income, the county is assisting them with compliance with respect to the rabies vaccination and licensing. By establishing these community resources, trustful relationships are built and pet owners are more likely to protect their pets against rabies, spay/neuter their pets using a county subsidized program and the registered microchip helps reunites pets with their families.

### Spay/Neuter Procedures



**Figure 9:** Chart depicts the increased number of spay neuter procedures completed for the public and shelter animals. As of the first quarter of 2018, BCAS is celebrating a total of 20,000 spay neuter procedures.

As discussed in detail in the 2016 Target Zero assessment report, providing access to low-income pet owners is essential. In addition to the spay/neuter of all shelter animals, there are now 3 subsidized programs available for the public that include the shelter in Baldwin and the Dundalk and Southwest Area Parks (SWAP) spay/neuter clinics.

It is recommended that at least 5 subsidized surgeries for low-income pet owners be done per 1,000 residents in a community to see shelter intake decrease. For Baltimore County, with 830,000 residents, that would mean 4,150 (half dogs and half cats). In 2017, 5,370 surgeries were done for the public at one of the BCAS locations yet shelter intake has increased. Reasons for this could include (a) a higher level of confidence in the new shelter and leadership, (b) the low-income group has not reached those surgery numbers as of yet or (c) targeted programs will take more time for the decrease in intake to occur.

At the shelter, public surgeries can be scheduled online but no longer cause a backlog for shelter pets. The Dundalk spay/neuter clinic opened in August of 2015. Shelter leadership looks to identify outside funding sources and has an excellent working relationship with the Department of Agriculture. Due to the high demand for spay/neuter in Dundalk, a recent grant was completed 3 months early, a testament to the desire pet owners have to spay/neuter when they have access. Over \$150,000 in spay/neuter grants have been awarded to BCAS for target zip codes.

At SWAP, a proactive plan that includes target/cross marketing to low-income pet owners and transport is in development. Due to the success with the Department of Agriculture grants, that department has invited BCAS to use SWAP as a spay/neuter Service Provider for clients residing anywhere in the state of Maryland. A grant application is currently pending with the Department of Agriculture for \$100,000 to enable BCAS to sterilize 2,500 feral cats at no cost to caregivers.

The county subsidized program that provides free surgery for cats and pit bulls belonging to low-income pet owners identifies crucial targets. Though there is no research that shows that pit bulls are inherently aggressive, they continue to be over-represented in shelters nationwide and challenging to overcome the bias of fear for potential adopters. Providing free surgeries for the most vulnerable population of pet owners and pets is the key strategy to prevent them from entering the shelter. All other county residents are charged only \$20 but BCAS leadership is encouraged to consider a sliding scale so those pet owners that can afford to pay more do.

### Volunteer Program

BCAS has designed a work force ample to operate the shelter and care for the animals between paid staff and the Department of Corrections program. Welcoming volunteers in the shelter enhances the care of animals and supplements the staff. This program also helps build a group of community ambassadors as volunteers not only help in the shelter but also with offsite adoption events as well.

A full-time coordinator was added in 2015 that is a key position to ensure the success of this program. Designating a point person on Sundays and Mondays that oversees volunteers would help expand the program even further. In an effort to build the best, most consistent team of volunteers, BCAS asks for a minimum commitment of 10 hours per month. Currently there are over 100 volunteers in the program, but not all are active on a regular basis.

For the second year in a row, BCAS has awarded the non-profit Rescue Well with a total of \$60,000 in grant funding. Rescue Well also welcomes volunteers that help accomplish their mission and these grants are used to help pet owners in need with subsidized veterinary care, supplies, temporary boarding and more in an effort to keep pets and owners together. Rescue Well volunteers provide important outreach for the shelter in the community and are in addition to the volunteers that help at the shelter.

The dedicated Facebook page for volunteers is an excellent way to share the many inspiring and heartwarming stories about shelter pets. The combination of shelter and Rescue Well volunteers is a very positive force in the community that amplifies care and help for pets in need.

## COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Public~Private partnerships have now proven to be extremely effective in capitalizing on the strengths of all organizational types and are absolutely crucial for a humane community. Unfortunately, many animal welfare organizations across the United States continue to work in silos.

Current shelter leadership, however, has excelled in building relationships with a variety of partners. *Rescue Well*, as mentioned above, uses grant money awarded by BCAS to help pets and owners in need, thereby keeping families together and acting as a Safety Net.

At the shelter, a labor force is provided through a partnership with the *Department of Corrections*. Inmates who are in good standing are scheduled to work at the shelter and cover 7 days either 8am to 4pm or 6pm. Work assignments include sanitation in the sections for healthy adoptable animals and common areas, socialization of shelter pets, laundry and other miscellaneous duties.

The *Rescue Partner Program*, discussed further in the Shelter Program section, is another example of extensive collaborative efforts. Since 2015, this program has grown exponentially from only 7 groups to over 150 registered partners.

The *Baltimore Animal Welfare Association (BAWA)* is made up of the local non-profit shelters that include the *Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter (BARCS)* that contracts with the city along with the *Baltimore Humane Society* and the *Maryland SPCA*. This group addresses local issues, hosts joint adoption events and ensures they are staying current with national trends and recommendations for Best Practices.



The *Department of Agriculture* not only provides spay/neuter grants but has invited BCAS to become a Service Provider for a cat spay/neuter program at SWAP. The department has awarded grants previously and now proving their confidence in BCAS with this invitation.

Public~private partnerships leverage the resources of all organizations and another important avenue that builds trust in the community. This is a win for the animals, the public and all the organizations, regardless of their infrastructure. Shelter leadership should be applauded for their commitment to collaboration.

## COMMUNITY MINDED ENFORCEMENT

### ***BCAS Enforcement Summary***

<b>Inspection type</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
<b>Stray confined</b>	3734	3329
<b>Cruelty</b>	2023	2279
<b>Menacing</b>	859	1305
<b>At large</b>	702	962
<b>Other types</b>	7648	7837
<b>Total</b>	14966	15712

**Figure 10:** Highlights top 4 call types that make up 47% (2016) and 53% (2017) of enforcement inspection types

Progressive municipal shelters, such as BCAS, are recognizing the benefits of proactive community programs as opposed to the antiquated punitive approach. In Boone County, Kentucky, for example, Animal Control Officers (ACOs) trap/neuter/return community cats in targeted areas as a way to productively decrease shelter intake thereby preventing complaint calls. There are many examples of this Best Practice program across the country and Baltimore County leadership applauded for the pilot program that has already decreased intake in excess of 300 ‘stray’ cats.

As mentioned, the reclassification of ACOs to Animal Services Officers (ASOs) was an excellent way to transition to this approach. Each morning, at the 8am Roll Call, the

team discusses the events from the day before that include needed follow up and review of any actions taken. This is the only way to ensure the lines of communication are clear and open between staff and with leadership.

In April of 2018, the police department will be taking over animal cruelty investigations and will work directly with the state attorney's office. This transition makes sense for several reasons. First, the police department is an enforcement agency with the resources to perform investigations. Secondly, it allows BCAS the ability to focus on animal sheltering and care and continue to serve as a resource for the community. It will allow ASOs to concentrate even more on proactive programs as 14% and 15% of the ASO's time has been dedicated to addressing cruelty complaints in the last 2 years. ASOs are an integral part of the success of the public rabies clinics as well as the care and rehabilitation of shelter pets.

Among those programs already in place is the involvement of the field team providing flyers for the constituents they come in contact with for rabies clinics and spay/neuter. These are the simple gestures that build positive relations in the community as interactions do not consistently involve warnings or citations. Furthermore, these interactions are most likely with the pet owning population that are in need of the most help.

The Milkman Program is an example of being of service in a positive way. When a constituent calls the shelter about an underage litter, ASOs deliver supplies to enable that Good Samaritan to foster. This program pays dividends as it prevents surrender and eliminates the emergency need for a foster family or a potential euthanasia for the most challenging subpopulation of underage kittens.

BCAS leadership is constantly looking for ways to serve constituents efficiently. Approximately half the complaints annually are resolved with the first phone call to animal services which preserves the ASO time for calls that must be addressed in person. In 2017, an app to request a service was launched and continues to be in development. And in the interest of serving the animal population more appropriately, new temperature controlled vans were purchased and are now in use. These vans are considered the most humane way to transport animals to the shelter.

## **SAFETY NET**

The term Safety Net has many analogous titles and may be called Managed Intake, Surrender Prevention or Surrender Mitigation. The underlying philosophy is that many people do not want to surrender their pets to a shelter but need some sort of temporary assistance. At the same time, the animal welfare industry as a whole has trained the public to use the shelter as the first option for surrender as opposed to the last resort.

A 2015 ASPCA study revealed that up to 40% of owners did not want to relinquish their pets but did not have access to temporary help and therefore surrendered to a shelter. The Sheriff's Office in Brevard County, Florida, decided to test this theory and after year 1 assisted 80% of the cats and 80% of the dogs outside the shelter system thus preventing the surrender.

BCAS is applauded for the ongoing grant program with the non-profit Rescue Well. This has no doubt prevented many surrenders and hopefully moving forward, that data can be captured by the non-profit. Rescue Well enlists volunteers to help accomplish their mission of helping pets and people in need. This leverages another population of community members in addition to the shelter volunteers. The non-profit has the added benefit of being an entity independent of the county so not subject to the procurement process and can negotiate pricing with veterinarians and other businesses.

One of the most important parts of the Safety Net program has been the pilot trap/neuter/return program or TNR (that also includes shelter/neuter/return) that began in 2015. This program has already decreased 'stray' cat intake from 2,108 in 2016 to 1,737 in 2017 and will continue to make an impact. Leadership is applauded for the implementation of this fiscally responsible and life-saving program. As of March 2018, when the intake of kittens usually increases, 'kitten season' has not yet started. This delay is a welcome and hallmark sign of impact in the target areas where cats were breeding exponentially and their offspring entering the shelter during the spring.

The Community Cat coordinator manages trap teams and only loans traps to the public as part of the TNR program. This coordinator reports they can resolve almost 100% of the issues with constituents presented to them. Municipal shelters that transition to TNR programs report the same results consistently. Approximately 1,000 cats went through the TNR program in 2017 and that number can dramatically increase especially if the Department of Agriculture grant is awarded for SWAP. The Community Cat coordinator has also recently created a Working Cat program which provides alternatives for cats that are unable to go back to their original location.

Major funders are now providing Safety Net grants, and when implemented means that shelter space is reserved for those pets with no other alternatives. The key is to offer solutions and work collaboratively with pet owners. One step that can be added at the point of intake at the shelter is to extend the Milkman Program offer to those Good Samaritans unfamiliar with the program. Turning any number of Good Samaritans into foster volunteers is a win for all involved.

Having a designated Safety Net coordinator that discusses alternatives and assistance prior to scheduling an appointment for surrender, is a wise investment. All assistance should be documented as this information is crucial to the development of an effective program and for any grant submissions.

## **SHELTER PROGRAMS**

### **Population Management**

Once all Safety Net and targeted community programs are in place, the shelter operation is able to run as efficiently as possible and utilized only for those pets with no other alternatives such as victims of cruelty/neglect or stray pets with no identified owner. All intake procedures at the shelter are in line with preventive care Best Practices.

Daily Rounds is the best strategy to move animals through the shelter system to live outcome as quickly as possible. The BCAS teams from the veterinary, rescue and kennel sections, all do Daily Rounds and meet weekly with the behavior staff to discuss any animals that may be more challenging to place or need special attention. This process has ensured that the length of stay is kept to a minimum.

As shelters progress towards a 90% or better live outcome percentage, the number of pets with medical or behavior issues increases. Those pets were historically the first to be euthanized. At BCAS, the pet's medical plan is tailored to their needs that may be met at the shelter or through private practice veterinarians. The 2017 live outcome percentage is testament of the dedication to life-saving.

Issues in the past regarding the backlog of spay/neuter for shelter pets has been resolved and surgery done the day the stray hold is over (for stray pets), the day after intake (for feral cats) or once the medical and behavior teams have evaluated them (owner surrenders).

The flow of pets through the shelter to live outcome involves many moving parts to include the use of technology. Each pet's picture is now posted in real time on the

website unless they are part of an enforcement case, TNR or highly aggressive, for example. Shelter Buddy is an excellent shelter software choice that should be considered.

## Enrichment for Dogs

*Without a doubt, the enrichment program for dogs at BCAS should be considered a national model.*

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A dedicated Behavior Coordinator was added to the team over 2 years ago and in addition to the standard Kuranda beds, blankets and toys, in depth attention has been paid to the comfort of the shelter dogs while the ultimate goal remains getting them to the best placement in the shortest amount of time. Dogs are fed in the morning then provided with a Kong with dry food inside at the end of the day. The opening of the Kong is packed with canned food. This gives the dog not only a second feeding but an interactive activity to keep them busy.



**Figure 11:** Shows a dog in the adoption section with a double sided run, Kuranda bed, toys and wearing a sweater, all highlighting the attention to keeping dogs as comfortable as possible during their stay

During a recent and prolonged cold snap, the dog kennels became uncomfortable. The county took action immediately and installed heaters in all the kennels, showing the commitment to the comfort of the shelter pets.

Exercise is the key strategy for keeping shelter dogs happy and content. Volunteers walk all the dogs in the adoption areas, more often on a specific schedule during the day if they are housebroken. Dogs may be identified for more trained volunteers as well.

Not all dogs are scheduled to interact with the Behavior Coordinator. For example, highly adoptable owner surrendered dogs may be fast tracked to adoptions and be placed quickly. Staff reports that approximately 80% of the dogs are placed within a week and not in need of behavior intervention. The Behavior Coordinator can then focus on dogs with challenging behaviors that are ear marked for rescue or need some sort of intervention. Much time is spent teaching dogs manners that will make them more adoptable. This staff person may also assist the medical team as they are interacting with dogs soon after they arrive at the shelter.



**Figure 12:** *Outside play areas are complete with agility equipment*

BCAS is commended for using the Match-Up II Shelter Dog Rehoming Program, as not all shelters devote as much time and attention to creating the best possible placement. This program is used as part of a tool kit and one aspect of decision making about the dogs in question. The program takes into account any known history, a behavior evaluation and behavior in the shelter to understand each dog's needs and special qualities.

The use of aromatherapy that has been researched and known to be calming to dogs is used throughout the dog areas. In the play yards, animal scents are used to encourage

activity and play. Inside the shelter, Rescue MP3 plays 40 hours of music, again researched and known to be pleasing to dogs. Music is on during the day with breaks for quiet time/socialization at lunch and at night while pets are sleeping.

Another tool that can highlight the dedication to enrichment is Fear Free certification. A certification specific for shelters is due out by 2019 but in the meantime the behavior team can get individual certification ([fearfreepets.com](http://fearfreepets.com)). BCAS is applauded for the crucial attention to enrichment and is encouraged to speak at regional and national conferences to share details about the innovative programming.

### Enrichment for Cats

Implementing a TNR program transforms the cat program in every shelter. Investing in this program by subsidizing surgeries will ultimately decrease cost of care through reduced intake. Reserving space only for those cats with no other alternatives along with targeted spay/neuter programs have led to a decrease in 'stray' cat intake from 2,108 to 1,737. The overall intake has increased, however, since the number of owner surrendered cats has increased. This can be addressed with a more aggressive Safety Net program.

A common and disturbing deficit that persists in many shelters is inadequate housing for cats. Studies have proved that under 11 square feet of space per shelter cat is the key risk factor for the development of upper respiratory infections.

All spaces at BCAS, including adoptions and the free roaming cat rooms provide appropriate and adequate space for cats. Stainless steel cages throughout the shelter have been portalized and the balance of cages in the stray hold room will be done soon. In adoptions, spacious condos with many options for cats, along with interactive toys and soft bedding, give them the most comfortable shelter spaces.

As a member of the national movement called the Million Cat Challenge, BCAS will likely receive the balance of the portals for stray hold at no charge. Providing enough space with options is the most essential part of enrichment for shelter cats.





**Figures 13 and 14:** Shows multiple options in a free roaming cat room for hiding and interactive play and an appropriately sized condo with separate areas for bed/food and litter box, as recommended



**Figures 15 and 16:** Shows condos with multiple levels and options for cats and the proper use of a feral den and portalized cage

Another key improvement that shelter leadership spearheaded was implementing spot cleaning for cats. We now know that it is not necessary to remove cats from their cages



to do a deep clean during their stay and that they are comforted by the familiar smells of blankets and toys in their cage spaces.

Cats part of the TNR program are housed appropriately in a separate and quiet room while they await surgery the day after intake and return to their original location the day after surgery, as is recommended. Cats may be kept cleaner while in their traps and the the workload on staff reduced, if traps were set on PVC pipes cut length-wise and newspaper/bedding removed. The trap could then be set above a metal or plastic tray to catch any urine. That way, the cat would not risk laying in any urine soaked material.



**Figure 17:** TNR cats are housed in a separate quiet room as recommended

Adult cats are provided with dry food throughout the day as well as canned food in the morning while kittens are fed both twice daily. Behavior staff work to socialize cats, provide them with toys and interactive activities, compliments of the Jackson Galaxy Foundation program. In addition to the Rescue MP3 music and aromatherapy, staff is also growing cat grass for shelter residents.

BCAS is congratulated for being selected for the Cat Pawsitive Project by the Jackson Galaxy Foundation. This program has provided staff and volunteers with specialized and advanced training in cat behavior, socialability and clicker training. The Jackson Galaxy Foundation is using the program to do research that will help increase adoptions and decrease length of stay so the work done at BCAS will help other shelters.

Again, this is a prime example highlighting the dedication to the shelter pets. Being selected by the Jackson Galaxy Foundation for this program is an honor as it was a very competitive process.

### Return to Owner

All shelter pets are checked for identification and scanned at multiple points during their stay that include intake, during the veterinary exam, surgery and prior to any final disposition in an effort to reunify a pet with their owner. Multiple scanner types are used to ensure no microchips are missed. Nationally, the return to owner rates for cats is well below 5% but thankfully the TNR program returns cats to their homes and has been implemented at BCAS.

In addition to checking for microchips, all proactive measures for reunification are taken for stray dogs as well and that includes posting their pictures on the website in real time. Pet owners also have 7-day access to the shelter to search for their lost pet, which is crucial.

If the owner is not found, the finder does have the first adoption option which serves to limit the amount of time a dog or cat must stay in the shelter. The number of dogs returned to their owner increased to 602 in 2017 from 452 in 2015. Providing microchips during the public rabies clinics is an excellent proactive program that will no doubt continue to reunite more pets with their owners in the future.

### Adoptions

The concept of open adoptions means that shelter staff welcome all potential adopters, judgement free, with the assumption that there are more 'good' pet owners than 'bad'.

Part of this philosophy is low or fee-waived adoptions. This is correlated with higher numbers of adoptions in shorter periods of time and not associated with negative outcomes such as more returns. BCAS hosts frequent promotions including many fee-waived adoption events for cats.

***The Adopters Welcome Guidelines about open adoptions must be mandatory reading for all leadership, staff and volunteers.***

The Express Cuddle Shuttle is a state of the art mobile adoption van purchased by the county and utilized for off-site adoption events 2 to 4 times a month. BCAS partners with BAWA for mega adoption events and the Maryland 2000, among others. Current offsite adoption partnerships with Petsmart Charities and Petvalu expand the reach for shelter pets. Likewise, the *Pets for Patriots* program and discount fees for military personnel and veterans, create more chances for shelter pets to find their forever homes. These programs highlight a true commitment to life-saving and are excellent ways to promote the shelter in the community.



**Figure 18:** *The Express Cuddle Shuttle is an excellent outreach and life-saving tool*

BCAS does an excellent job at showcasing pets in the shelter. In addition to the welcoming atmosphere, enrichment and ample spaces for pets, a grooming room is available and utilized by volunteers or staff when needed. All pets in the adoption area are sterilized and ready to leave to their permanent homes.

BCAS is currently open on Sundays and Mondays for reunification and intake. Shelter leadership is currently working on a cost analysis, staffing needs and possible reclassification of key positions to include adoptions on Sundays and Mondays by the end of 2018.

Each adopter gets individualized attention when visiting the shelter. Staff or volunteers are available to answer questions in an effort to make the best possible match. All these efforts have resulted in an increase of adoptions from 1,447 to 1,512 between 2015 and 2017.

## Rescue Partnerships and Foster Care

A much needed full time Rescue and Foster Coordinator was added in 2015 and the program expanded from a core of approximately 7 groups to over 150. The coordinator ensures that groups are established 501c3 organizations and they may be local, regional or national. This has no doubt contributed to the enormous growth of this program. In 2017, 1,426 pets were transferred to rescue partners compared to 917 in 2015.

BCAS includes spay/neuter prior to the transfer to groups and does not charge a fee. This is a welcome protocol that helps eliminate barriers for rescue partners and an excellent example of life-saving collaboration.

Foster Care is another program that has experienced enormous growth. In 2016, this program was limited only to staff and a few key volunteers. Since that time, BCAS has welcomed the public and now there are more than 50 foster volunteers. The Rescue and Foster Coordinator manages the Facebook group page and schedules training such as an upcoming session dedicated to underage kittens. The coordinator is also hosting a Kitten Shower in the upcoming weeks.

The coordinator ensures vaccines and surgery for foster pets are scheduled in a timely manner and appointments made for the medical team. The goal for foster pets is to go directly to an offsite adoption event following spay/neuter so they bypass the shelter. This is an excellent and highly recommended way to get pets into homes quickly. Highly coordinated teamwork is evident between the coordinator, medical team, foster volunteer and adoption event volunteers.

With the expansion of these life-saving programs in such a short period of time, ASOs may also be used to help coordinate foster care during the busy season and with transport to rescue. During the assessment visit, the coordinator reported that foster volunteers are 'on deck' at the moment and as mentioned, 'kitten season' seems to be arriving later this year over last. This is a hallmark sign that BCAS spay/neuter efforts in the community are working.

## SUMMARY

The BCAS team will soon be celebrating 10,000 lives saved in the new facility and as of the first quarter of 2018, 20,000 spay neuter surgeries since opening the public programs in 2014. The transformation of the entire Baltimore County Animal Services department, from targeted community services to enforcement and enrichment and live outcome, BCAS leadership is congratulated for their dedication and commitment to Best Practices.

As discussed, core Best Practices are shared by all national reputable animal welfare organizations, however, BCAS leadership has led the team to exceed those expectations in many areas. The dramatic increase in live outcome in 3 years, despite increasing intake, the innovative enrichment program and attention to staff development are above and beyond.

BCAS leadership is encouraged to speak at regional and national conferences and give webinars so other municipal shelters may improve as well. Team Shelter USA commends the entire BCAS team.

## RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

### Websites

- [sheltervet.org](http://sheltervet.org) (The Association of Shelter Veterinarians)
- [aspcapro.org](http://aspcapro.org) (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals)
- [animalsheltering.org](http://animalsheltering.org) (Humane Society of the United States)
- [bestfriends.org](http://bestfriends.org) (Best Friends Animal Society)
- [MaddiesFund.org](http://MaddiesFund.org) (Maddie's Fund)
- [alleycatallies.org](http://alleycatallies.org) (Alley Cat Allies)
- [millioncatchallenge.org](http://millioncatchallenge.org) (Million Cat Challenge)
- [petmicrochiplookup.org](http://petmicrochiplookup.org) (AAHA Universal Pet Microchip Look Up)
- [shelteranimalscount.org](http://shelteranimalscount.org) (Shelter Animals Count)
- [atts.org](http://atts.org) ([American Temperament Testing Society](http://AmericanTemperamentTestingSociety.org))
- [target-zero.org](http://target-zero.org) (Target Zero)
- [fearfreepets.com](http://fearfreepets.com) (Fear Free Certification)

### Webinars

- [Best Practice Strategies for Redefining Animal Sheltering](#) presented by Dr. Sara Pizano
- [Return to Field: Putting Theory into Action Saving Cats](#) presented by Cameron Moore
- [Creating Responsible Lifesaving Public Policy: Solutions for Community Cats](#) presented by Dr. Sara Pizano
- [Stress Reduction: Happy and Healthy Shelter Cats on a Fast Track to Adoption](#) presented by Dr. Brenda Griffin

### Books

- Infectious Disease Management in Animal Shelters, Lila Miller, DVM & Kate Hurley, DVM
- Shelter Medicine for Veterinarians and Staff, Lila Miller, DVM & Steven Zawistowski, PhD, CAAB
- Getting to Zero, Peter Marsh
- Replacing Myth with Math, Peter Marsh
- Every Nose Counts: A Guide to Using Metrics in Animal Shelters, J. Scarlett; M. Greenberg; T. Hoshizaki

## Guides

- [The Association of Shelter Veterinarians Veterinary Medical Care Guidelines for Spay-neuter Programs](#)
- [The Association of Shelter Veterinarians Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters](#)
- [Adopters Welcome, Humane Society of the United States](#)
- [Best Friends Community Cat Programs Handbook](#)
- [The Five Freedoms](#)
- [Managing Heartworm Disease in Shelter Animals](#)
- [Humane Society of the United States Volunteer Management for Animal Care Organizations](#)
- [Maddie's Pet Assistant](#)